

A Complete and Necessary Turnaround for the Nation

By Rep. Neil Abercrombie

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act may be the culmination of the most dramatic and decisive turnaround in federal government history. Less than four weeks ago, the Bush Administration fought to continue the practice of paying a woman less than a man for the same job. Today, women have more access to the courts when they've been victimized.

Less than four weeks ago, the Bush Administration opposed making sure that more sick kids had basic medical care. Today, an additional 18,000 keiki in Hawaii can be covered by SCHIP.

Less than four weeks ago, the Bush Administration had stalled energy efficiency regulations for six years. Today, our economic recovery package includes funding to double the nation's renewable energy generating capacity over three years, create thousands of green jobs and help build the renewable and alternative energy industry into a foundation for a 21st Century U.S. economy.

Less than four weeks ago, our city, county and state governments were facing huge cuts in services to taxpayers, and the Bush Administration was fully prepared to do absolutely nothing. Today, we have an economic recovery measure that will help keep police on the beat, teachers in the classroom, and make sure that when you dial 9-1-1, somebody answers.

In the final three months of Bush Administration, the U.S. economy shrank nearly 4%, and in January alone lost nearly 600,000 jobs while Wall Street executives were rewarding themselves with \$18-million in bonuses for outstanding work. Today, in this economic recovery legislation, here in Hawaii, 95% of our families will have immediate tax cuts and 15,000 new jobs will be created.

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All of us who worked to write and pass this legislation, led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, shared a deep sense of urgency to formulate a bill that would help the most people as quickly as possible. We fully understand the situation: small businesses and large corporations closing their doors; 19,000 Americans a day losing their jobs; more and more families losing their homes; even those with solid incomes and perfect credit having problems obtaining loans; and consumer spending and private sector investment in the economy shutting down. Without this injection of funds from the federal government, the entire U.S. economy would continue to hemorrhage pink slips and home foreclosures, and Hawaii would be devastated as travel plans evaporated.

Yet, despite the broad scope and profound impact of this financial crisis on the well-being of millions of people and their families, a sizeable number in Congress put an opportunity for partisan insurgency ahead of their responsibility to the country. The House passed the recovery bill without a single Republican vote. In the Senate, three Republican Members were willing to consider and, ultimately, support the final bill. I am sure there are a few Republicans who sincerely believe that government should stand by and do nothing while the economy collapses. But I am just as certain that many of their colleagues saw the recovery bill debate only as a path for their return to power.

The three Republican Senators who supported the final bill exacted a brutal price: \$100 billion dollars in cuts to local, state and national priorities: education, Head Start, healthcare, worker training, renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The legislation we passed Friday will be quickly signed into law by President Obama, who consulted, persuaded, cajoled and negotiated with Republicans and Democrats to move the complex measure past all the pitfalls and obstacles in the legislative process. That process needs attention. It shouldn't be so difficult to do what's right; to do what's obviously needed.

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If we do not reform the legislative process, we face the prospect of unproductive and politically-driven obstruction on every issue — including our national budget and the twelve appropriation bills that we must pass every year to fund our military, homeland security and all the government services that the public demands.

What's important today is that we were able to come together to pass the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a life and death matter for the U.S. economy. A sufficient number of Representatives and Senators were willing to work for the common good. And, our Hawaii delegation was able to work closely and smoothly with President Obama to make sure our state's needs were not overlooked.

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